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Knowing the Trends Pays Off for Immigrant Entrepreneur

New York, NY— Michelle Hsu and her husband Nicholas first arrived in the U.S. from Taiwan in 1989, under the federal government's Treaty Investors Visa and settled in Texas to invest in oil and real estate, and make their fortune. Then came the infamous Big Bust. Caught off guard, the Hsu's cut their losses, pulled up stakes and re-settled in Florida. This painful lesson about the importance of researching business trends was not lost on them; as Michelle has since parlayed it into a blazingly successful new enterprise – the International Academic Alliance.

In Taiwan, Michelle had been considered a pioneer in the concept of “off-site” MBAs. She leveraged that experience to create multi-national, cross-cultural business education programs in the U.S. Rather than start completely from scratch, she streamlined the process by establishing course accreditation partnerships with major colleges and universities in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Michigan and North Dakota, simultaneously giving those institutions a presence overseas.

The Hsu's relocated to New York in 1994, anticipating and then capitalizing on computer-science education in major urban markets. The business did well until the combined catastrophes of 9/11 and the death of Nicholas threw a wrench into the works.

Going back to the drawing board, Hsu identified the next big thing as the healthcare sector, and nursing in particular. She launched a successful partnership program with the Corcoran School of Nursing, and soon extended the partnership to Adelphi University. Starting with three nursing prep students in 2002, the program has since graduated 200 nurses, with another 400 students currently in the pipeline.

Grappling with the blessings and burdens of unprecedented growth, Hsu realized she needed additional working capital to better serve her students. She applied for, and received, a \$200,000 loan from United Commercial Bank. The loan was guarantied by the U.S. Small Business Administration under its *ExpressLoan* Program, which allows a private lender to use its own paperwork in place of the SBA's in return for a 50 percent guaranty of the loan amount.

The loan enabled Hsu to open a second “capsule campus” at 250 W. 40th Street. (The original campus remains on Sixth Avenue near Bryant Park.) The new campus hosts master’s degree programs in accounting, finance and business administration, in partnership with accredited colleges in the U.S., China and India. With overseas offices in Beijing, Taipei, Mumbai and Bangalore, the company now has 11 employees and 15 adjunct professors on staff, and annual receipts since the loan, have grown from \$1.1 million to \$2 million.

Hsu was honored last year for her community service with an award from the Queens Theatre in the Park, and was recently elected to its board of directors. This spirit of service, combined with a hard-won zeal for research and trend-spotting, has positioned Michelle Hsu and the “Alliance” for continued success. And, as Hsu freely admits, having the right partners – her husband, her university affiliates, and the SBA – certainly helps.

More information about International Academic Alliance can be found at: www.iaaprograms.com.

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